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Misogyny and Violent Extremism – A Potential National Security Issue

By Yasmine Wong

SYNOPSIS

Misogyny's link to violent extremism and its potential to cause societal polarisation suggests that it should be treated as a national security issue.

COMMENTARY

The UK [Home Office](#) recently announced that it is considering treating extreme misogyny (i.e., hatred of or prejudice against women) as a form of extremism following an ongoing review of the government's counter-extremism strategy. The government believes that misogyny is an ideological trend that is gaining traction and fuelling extremism in the country.

At the centre of this phenomenon is the "[manosphere](#)" – a networked group of online communities promoting "anti-feminism, misogyny, and hateful ideas" about women and sexual minorities. Groups like "Incels" (involuntary celibates) and "Men's Rights Activists" famously make up the manosphere. They have a violent and extremist edge and portray men as victims in a world that they perceive to be benefitting women and other minorities.

The manosphere has, unfortunately, crept into the mainstream through the popularisation and dissemination of misogynistic narratives by social media personalities like [Andrew Tate](#). That misogyny appears to be [driving extremism](#) and has the potential to cause societal polarisation suggests that it is no longer an ideological problem but has become a national security one.

Misogyny as a “Gateway Drug” to Violent Extremism

Far-right extremist attacks motivated by misogyny have surfaced in the last five years. In 2023, the perpetrator of the mall shooting in Allen, Texas, where eight people were killed, was found to have [misogynistic, white supremacist and racist tendencies](#). In 2021, the [gunman](#) who killed eight people (of which six were Asian women) in Atlanta was believed to have been motivated by misogynistic and racist inclinations. In 2020, a man in Hanau, Germany, went on a [shooting rampage](#), killing nine people. He was thought to have also been motivated by similar tendencies.

[Researchers](#) hypothesise that misogyny has become a “[gateway drug](#)” to far-right violent extremism. This happens when the ideological frame that blames women for individual and societal ills is expanded to include ethnic or religious “others”, opening the cognitive door to wider forms of hate-based and exclusionary extremism against different identity groups.

For instance, the perceived existential threat posed by feminism and gender equality on men has been likened to the perceived existential threat that migrants pose to the white male identity as initially outlined in “great replacement” or “white genocide” conspiracies. In other words, far-right actors employ misogyny in intersection with racism and xenophobia, blaming women, migrants, and other minorities for the decline of traditional notions of nationhood, family, and masculinity.

Misogyny Has Crept Into the Mainstream

Misogyny is no longer confined to the fringes of subcultures and communities; it has crept into the mainstream. The rise of online personalities like [Andrew Tate](#), Jordan Peterson, Myron Gaines, and Walter Weekes, who peddle toxic masculinity, and misogynistic views, is a worrying trend. Tate, for example, exploits male fears about their economic futures and the threat to hegemonic masculinity. His social media content, often seen as “humorous” and “authentic”, serve as [social currency](#) among young men and boys.

[Social media algorithms](#) are also complicit in the amplification of misogynistic content, pushing “toxic, hateful or misogynistic material” to young people (particularly boys suffering from anxiety and poor mental health) under the guise of entertainment. [Researchers](#) found a four-fold increase in misogynistic content recommended by TikTok’s algorithm over a five-day period of study, amping up to more extreme videos which focus on “anger and blame directed at women”.

The results from a separate [Australian study](#) conducted in 2022 corroborate this, finding that algorithms used in YouTube and YouTube Shorts contributed to the promotion of “misogynistic, anti-feminist and other extremist content” to Australian boys and young men. A 2024 [Irish study](#) produced similar results – TikTok and YouTube recommended misogynist content to boys and young men regardless of whether they actively searched for it, with the intensity increasing according to the level of engagement.

Misogyny In Asia

In Asia, “[male anger](#)” allows misogynistic narratives and the broader extremist ideologies that they harbour to take root among a susceptible audience. In South Korea and Japan, there is an observed [increase in misogynistic attacks](#) inspired by elements of Incel ideology.

In [China](#), misogynistic terms and narratives similar to those used in Incel communities of the West are to be found in most social media platforms, with high-profile anti-feminist influencers like Zhu Zhou encouraging attacks against women who do not fulfil “reproductive duties”.

In India, the flourishing Indian Incel community feeds off and exacerbates the misogyny already prevalent in Indian society, with violence meted out to women by men “who feel slighted or rejected by them”. Known as [Currycels](#), Indian Incels believe that they are disadvantaged because of their race (as Indian women are thought to prefer White men) and that they are the victims of feminism.

These examples appear to underscore the view that feminist progress and greater gender equality [begets misogynistic backlash](#). It also raises the question of whether such misogyny will give rise to far-right extremism and violence in the future.

Implications for Singapore

While the popularity of manosphere content has not been ascertained in Singapore, [local online spaces](#), particularly local Reddit communities and forums like HardwareZone and Sammyboy, do play host to misogynistic narratives. The narratives, particularly those that feature the privileges of women at the expense of men, have been observed to mirror narratives found in the manosphere.

In r/Singapore (a community where Reddit users discuss topics relating to Singapore), [users lament](#) about institutions such as the Singapore legal system and national service favouring women and disadvantaging men. They argue that Singaporean women are not oppressed, which justifies ire against feminism and gender equality.

A [study](#) conducted by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) found a host of misogyny in Singapore’s social media space, with content ranging from outright expressions of violence against women to narratives that reinforce gender stereotypes, with the most common being comments that belittled and objectified women. Misogynistic content was also found to have higher levels of engagement.

The [2024 Ipsos survey](#) found that almost half of Singaporeans think efforts toward women’s equality have gone so far that they now occur at the expense of men. Notably, men echo these statements at a far higher rate than women. Similarly, the results of a [2022 Ipsos survey](#) conducted in Singapore mirror those of the 2024 study, where one in three Singaporean men believed that feminism does more harm than good, and that “traditional masculinity is under threat”, with a quarter denying the existence of gender inequality.

While there may not be reported cases of misogyny directly leading to instances of

far-right extremism in Singapore, this idea of “traditional masculinity being under threat” evokes concerning parallels with misogynistic narratives that serve as rallying calls in far-right spaces.

Furthermore, Singapore remains highly connected to the Internet, and a [survey](#) revealed that online misogyny is commonplace. It also reported that six in ten young people spoke of being exposed to sensitive content (including gender-based hate) without searching for it. The proliferation of misogynistic (and incel-adjacent) narratives online may be an indication that conditions exist that are conducive for such extremist ideologies to take root here.

Conclusion

Regardless of how misogyny and the gender divide present themselves, the resultant impact is the same – the exacerbation of polarisation along intersecting identity lines and the rise of extremism. Rather than normalising the gender divide and misogynistic attitudes, it is imperative to understand the risks associated with the global growth of misogyny, not just in its insidious role in violent extremism, but also its potential to damage the social fabric.

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